RELIGION AND LIBERTY:

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT THE

OPENING OF THE SESSION 1882-3

OF

MANCHESTER NEW COLLEGE, LONDON.

BY

JAMES DRUMMOND, LL.D.

PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY.

οὗ δὲ τὸ πνεῦμα κυρίου, ἐλευθερία.

WILLIAMS AND NORGATE,

14, HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON;
AND 20, SOUTH FREDERICK STREET, EDINBURGH.

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RELIGION AND LIBERTY.

THE Session on which we enter to-day brings us together under somewhat changed conditions—conditions which, it is hoped, will add to the practical efficiency and public usefulness of the College, and will in no respect impair the fundamental principle upon which our work is based. If the closer alliance between Manchester New College and University Hall succeed in associating our divinity students more intimately with laymen of earnest character and scholarly habits, whether of the same or of various forms of religious belief, and in thus communicating to both classes a larger and more serious outlook over the world of thought, and a happier acquaintance with different types of human culture and tendency, we shall all rejoice in so desirable a result. But however this may be, the two institutions whose marriage, after so long an engagement, we now celebrate, rest upon the same broad foundation of religious liberty, and alike repudiate every attempt to fetter the intellect with chains of irreversible dogma, or to tie down the aspiring soul to any particular level of religious experience. Alike they would point out to the student the infinite universe of truth, and bid him pursue his researches with the generous ardour of youthful hope, not

fearing to stand alone or to give free play to whatever of original tendency or acquired aptitude he may find within himself; only they would ask him to enter this sublime temple with the holy step of one consecrated to some high service, and to remember that freedom for himself logically involves respect towards others.

The demand for free inquiry in matters of religion may spring from two very different sources. It may arise from antagonism to the religious temperament, combined with an intellectual impatience which cleverly exposes the blemishes in an argument, but has no eye for those deeper problems that press upon the human heart, and still recur from age to age, though they may never receive from our limited thought a perfect and final solution. To one with this defective range of mind, religion is synonymous with superstition. He views it only as an engine of oppression, and an obstacle to the advancement of individual culture and social improvement; and if he condescends to study its history, he discerns in its persistent vitality merely a human phenomenon, and in the various forms which it has assumed in the past, nothing more than the ghosts of dead illusions. Its secret life is hidden from him; and, however acute may be his intelligence, he remains a shallow interpreter of the mysteries of faith. His zeal for liberty is consequently one-sided. He can recognize impartiality only in assaults upon venerable beliefs; and while he cheers on a destructive criticism and applauds every crude innovation, he has nothing but contempt for the efforts of constructive genius or the holy calm of ancient piety. Nevertheless, his cry for freedom is good. Every mind has a right to the exercise of its own best powers, and, so long

as it is honest, is capable of some divine work. Even a Secularist who blindly smites popular errors with the rude blows of vulgar declamation, may be an unconscious instrument of God, and help to break up the soil for some new and fairer growth of religion. The eccentricities of heresy are largely due to the hardness and tyranny of established creeds, and the demon of intolerance is the parent of reaction and denial. One who is animated by the Spirit of God has room in the largeness of his heart for men of every tendency of thought, and, instead of arrogantly repelling the Agnostic and the Atheist into a defiant and irrevocable unbelief, would recognize in them too the children of God, and through the meekness of wisdom and love nurture them into faith.

There is, however, a demand for liberty which grows from a nobler root, and expresses, not indifference or hostility towards religion, but a profound sense of its awful import. Religion is too inward and too sacred to be received as a matter of social custom, and its deepest life cannot be known till we enter into our own spirits, and exercise our own thought upon the visions, clear or shadowy, which we there discern. It is possible to assent to a whole system of dogmas, and yet never to have felt as a reality the touch of God upon our souls or the divine appeal of duty. The absence of doubt is often only a synonym for the absence of faith; and even he who with a reverent despair shrinks from turning into the articulate language of earth the echoes of the voice of God which he has heard in the inner sanctuary, knows more of the spirit and power of religion than the stoutest defender of the creeds who has never got behind them and explored for himself the truths

which they represent. A half truth which lives is better than a whole truth which is dead; and experience seems to prove, what we might anticipate from the general laws of mental growth, that where the hand of authority is heaviest, religion is apt to be superstitious and intelligence to be sceptical. We ask for freedom, then, as the condition of religious vitality, and deny the right of any fellow-man to step between the soul and God, and mar with his bungling fingers the work of the Holy Spirit. We remember, too, that theology, the intellectual expression of religion, stands in relation to the whole circle of knowledge, and must therefore participate in the great movements of thought which arise from enlarged science and improved methods of investigation. The needed modifications cannot take place without a dangerous friction, unless the theologian be as unshackled in his department of research as the man of science is in his. Extreme pretensions on one side beget extreme denials on the other; but where liberty of thought is reverenced, denial is only the reverse side of larger affirmation. We cannot stop the rising tide of knowledge and reason, though by our foolish interference we may break and fret its majestic flow; and we ask that it should be allowed to come on in undisturbed obedience to the heavenly attraction. The untrammelled exercise of our highest gifts cannot permanently dash any true ideal, but, by presenting it in fresh form to the eye of thought, will also transfigure it for the more reluctant spirit into a richer beauty and more commanding expression. Many a timid and pious worshipper may have wept for the departing household gods of Greece and Rome, and sighed that the earth had become profane when Olympus had lost its lord;

yet the world did not sink into Atheism, and mountains were as sacred to Wordsworth as to Pindar. Nor will the universe become now the trampled and desecrated ruin of an ancient shrine because our limited conceptions have to stretch themselves to a newly revealed magnificence, and watch the unfolding of eternal thought across immeasurable space and through untold ages. But the theologian must be free in order to meet frankly the new conditions amid which he is placed, and, by framing a theology in harmony with the conclusions of science, save the religious sentiment from temporary eclipse. The cry for liberty, then, may be raised in the interests of religion itself. It may be the soul's response to a divine command to draw near and hear what the Spirit says, its pledge of fealty to the God of truth. One who takes this view must defend his freedom of thought as an inestimable possession; for it is to him the condition of spiritual wholeness and intellectual sincerity.

It is on this higher ground that our College rests its "principle of freely imparting theological knowledge without insisting on the adoption of particular theological doctrines" by either its professors or its students. It is not because it deems religion the hollow prop of unsubstantial fancies, but because it descries it towering into the infinite heavens, and holding on high the eternal truth and reality of things, that it asks to turn thither its own exploring gaze, and report simply what it sees. It has been described somewhere as a "Free-Thought College;" and when we remember that freedom is the condition of the healthy exercise of thought, and that thought is the great instrument of human progress, we may regard this fictitious name as a compliment. Nevertheless, the designation

is misleading, because it expresses only one side of our spiritual position, and is apt to suggest a divorce between thought and religion. But, in reality, our liberty is the offspring of our faith, which at the same time would keep itself open to the deepening lessons of experience, and is too firmly settled to fear lest God should be dethroned unless we stop the mouth of some fellow-mortal who may have a message for mankind different from our own, or lest darkness should overspread the world unless we excommunicate some brother who is groping in temporary blindness of the spirit. Instead of imagining any antagonism between religion and intellectual freedom, our College perceives that each is essential to the highest life of the other. Religion, when deprived of the bracing air of discussion and criticism, and the power of modifying its organism to suit its environment, must either dwindle into a shrivelled sentimentality or harden into an unspiritual dogmatism; and free thought, when it owns no higher inspiration, is superficial and contracted in its judgments, and oppressed by those prejudices of self-love which only the fire of sacrifice can burn away.

We ask you, then, to come to the study of religion, not only as one of the most remarkable factors in human experience, but as a testimony to the reality of eternal things which transcend experience. Not that we are ignorant of the great evils which have dogged the steps of religion, or are unable to sympathize with the horror-struck and splendid denunciation of Lucretius,

> "Sæpius illa
> Religio peperit scelerosa atque impia facta."

We can see the earth strewn with the shattered idols of

superstition, and catch the dying mutter of cruel passions which religion, with its unnatural ethics, has seemed to foster, and civilization, with its strong secular hand, to repress. We can shudder at the ghastly tale of blood, and wonder at the overmastering impulse of credulity, which the history of fanaticism unfolds. But in it all we can discern the struggle of the human soul towards a lofty ideal; above the clashing of contending creeds we can hear the deeper tones of a harmony unknown to the disputants themselves; and in the fantastic shapes of error we behold sublime and awful, though dim and distorted, images of God. We learn that though science may map out our road, and provide the instruments needed for progress, yet the impelling motive lies elsewhere. There is a power which draws us up, and lures us on with glimpses of supreme holiness and beauty. We feel its attraction even when it takes no definite shape in our thought, and prior to the activity of the speculative intellect a mysterious prompting turns our eyes towards the dawning light. In other words, the impulse of worship is laid deep in our nature; we are sensitive to something higher than physical forces; and the human heart yields such response as its ignorance and weakness will allow to a call which it clearly perceives to be other than the reverberations of its own voice.

It is owing to this inward source that religion survives the demolition of so many of its forms. The form is transient, but the spirit is eternal. First come the vaticinations of faith, afterwards the interpretations and proofs of theology. The latter are limited to the domain of the intellect, and are justly assailable by intellectual methods;

but the former recur, and rise again like stars, in spite of every apparent refutation. Religion in its essential character belongs to the ideal realm. Its belief rests upon what eye has not seen nor ear heard; its search is for what the mind of man has not conceived. If it descended within the confines of outward experience, and placed itself on a par with scientific knowledge, it would lose its identity. It calls upon men not to be misled by sensible appearances, but to trust that more searching vision which it is impossible to verify experimentally. Thus, in a world where dependence upon earthly conditions, and the ultimate death and decay of every organized being, are the scientific facts, it proclaims the existence of an immortal life of communion with God. In the midst of so much inexplicable suffering, arising from disease, accident, poverty, or disappointment, it declares that infinite wisdom and love direct the troubled scene, and that not a sparrow falls unheeded to the ground. In presence of a universal experience of sin, it summons man to the sinless and perfect, and bids him, in spite of demonstrated weakness and failure, look forward to a better day. Though tortuous policy often seems to triumph, and selfishness achieves its ends, while virtue bows the head in anguish, and upright patriotism is reviled, it asserts that eternal justice rules, and that its light shall at last break from behind the cloud.

To one, then, whose whole habit of mind leads him to rely on external experience as the sole criterion of truth, religion must necessarily appear to be a cloud-land of dreams and visions, which not only has nothing substantial to support it, but shatters itself against the hard facts

of nature and human life; and in an age like our own, in which the dominant intellectual movement is directed towards physical science, the truth of spiritual perception will be keenly contested, and the events which in all periods constitute the trials of faith will assume the rank of arguments for unbelief. The pleas put forward by religious men lose their thrilling touch, and are felt by the colder scientific mind as a dead man's hand; and even high philosophical argument, which has satisfied men of large intelligence, and seems to place the first truths of theology upon the solid basis of reason, fails to carry with it the old conviction. Man and God, the daily experience and the ideal hopes of humanity, are not united by the links of an argument; and even if the existence of God could be established in the same way as that of heat or electricity, a Deity who merely filled a gap in a chain of scientific reasoning would not be the Father whom our souls adore. Before there is religious faith there must be religious sensibility, and the conviction that holds us, and becomes a commanding power in our lives, is not drawn from without, as we learn the growth of a flower or the orbit of a comet, but wells up from the inner sources of our being, sources themselves unseen, and witnesses of unseen things. It is to those who have this inward impulse that the arguments of theology prove convincing; and these arguments, therefore, are not the creators, but rather the after-thoughts and defenders of faith.

But this being the case, must we admit the charge of special pleading which is brought against the theologian, and deny that he has any title to believe because he cannot produce evidences which all rational men are compelled

to accept? We cannot allow the relevancy of this charge or this denial, because it is not pretended that theology is a demonstrative or inductive science, like astronomy or chemistry, which can at will repeat its observations or experiments. The experiences on which it rests are not physical, but spiritual; and accordingly they are in their very nature incommunicable, and cannot be reproduced in obedience to our volition. A man can no more make himself a saint than he can make himself a poet or an artist. All high creative power is given, and cannot be bought with money or earned by toil; and we can as little command the voice of God to speak in our souls as we can waken our sensibility to the lessons of the "primrose by the river's brim," or cleanse our eye to discern the beauty of form and colour. But because we cannot communicate, or, when we will, renew our religious experiences, we are not to dismiss them as though they had no significance; for though, like other mental gifts, they come to men in very various measures, they mark a burning path through human history, and encircle the earth with a garland of light. They are more vivid and profound than any physical experience, and gather power and glory as the ages pass. To one who interprets them from within, and can disentangle them from the aberrations of ignorance and the corrupting mixture of selfish passion, they alone seem to give to our nature its finished beauty, its richest harmony, its highest exaltation. View them as we may, they spring up within us from the fountain-force of the universe, claiming us with an authority we cannot resist, and breathing an ineffable peace and love amid the lower strife of intellect and will. You speak of their mean beginnings

and the silly fancies of the savage mind; but why should the evolution of religion, starting from the humble seed of timorous worship, and gradually lifting on high its mighty aspiration and spreading abroad its grand ideals, end at last in the rot of irretrievable falsehood, while the senses and the intellect, in spite of an equally vulgar origin, continue to deserve our respect? In truth, there is nothing vulgar in the slow majesty of nature, and through all its range alike we may trust the power that draws us upward. The consciousness of divine possibilities which sleep within us may, indeed, paint only allegorical pictures of what is to be; still we must follow the light, nor believe it the less because we seem to behold changing and shifting forms amid the radiance, and know not yet what we shall be, or what vision will greet our sight when with perfect holiness we gaze upon the Holiest.

If it be contended that many men have no such experiences, and that it is sheer fanaticism to pretend to have any source of evidence which is not universally accessible, we must ask whether it is intended by this contention to deny the reality of the experiences in question, or to affirm that where they exist they are only a disease of the imagination? That they are real cannot, of course, be doubted by any one who has them, and the only misgiving that can steal upon his mind is whether they may not after all be shapes of the childish fancy, which a more mature culture will in time dispel. There are, however, two sufficient reasons to convince us that it is not the spiritual vision, but the misgiving, that springs from the weakness of our nature. If we do not look beyond ourselves, but consider simply the intrinsic nature of religious experience, we can-

not but feel that the impulse which opens and widens our soul towards the infinite, which lifts us out of our selfishness with all its petty cares and mean ambitions, which renders intolerable to us everything that is perverse and disingenuous, and places us in sympathy with all that is lovely in character, sublime in thought, generous and heroic in action, belongs to our highest and not our lowest moments, and is the ripening promise of a golden future rather than the fetid excrescence of a stupid past. It is in communion with God that we are absolutely sane, and that every part of our complex nature escapes from the morbid growths of egotism. So it would be if we stood alone upon the mountain-top; and the solitary Christ in the midst of an unbelieving generation could not, without falsity, have denied what he had seen and heard. But we are not alone. It is the men who know nothing of these things that are alone; and from amid the superficial fret and surge of life the deep undertone of worship rises up from the human heart, and the many accents of men blend into the acknowledgment of a Goodness higher than their own. It is the apparent certainty of the intellect that is continually melting away before the advent of fresh knowledge; our alleged dreams and fancies indicate the permanent bent of our nature. The scientific speculations of an early age only excite a smile in the thinker of to-day; but the deeper utterances of the soul have no date. Just in proportion as men have been able to detach themselves from current modes of thought, and to sink into the eternal heart of things, have they spoken words for all time; and there are few so dull that they hear no inward echo of these oracles of the spirit. We need not, then, heed

the taunts of the self-complacent rejecter of what is grandest and most permanent in man. There is no conceited assertion of self in maintaining the reality of that within us which we feel to be higher than self. The fanatic, indeed, may seek to appropriate the Divine Spirit; but it is treason against this spiritual light to glorify ourselves or to despise others. The truly spiritual will honour each man for his peculiar gift, and for himself will humbly fear lest he should defile what has been committed to his charge. We may gladly acknowledge that the man who can regard religion only critically, renders it a valuable service by clearing away unwholesome accretions, and forcing it in self-defence to come nearer to its ideal; but not the less do we feel assured that one hour's conscious wrestling with the Spirit would alter his theory of the universe, and bring home to him the majesty and power of what now he misunderstands and, in his ignorance, decries.

Such, then, is the fundamental fact upon which theology reposes, and which gives it an indestructible vitality. But theology itself involves an intellectual process, and inevitably shares the uncertainty and liability to change which besets other intellectual pursuits. It has to interpret by the light of reason and knowledge the religious experiences of mankind; and the theory which at one period is perfectly reasonable because it apparently satisfies all the conditions of thought, may become at another time unreasonable because it is inconsistent with newly discovered facts. That changes of this kind have taken place in the past, and that one affecting the very basis of theological belief is going on at the present time, are circumstances too familiar to require more than an allusion. But we

would not dwell at present on the mutability of theological thought, so much as on the fact that theology is demanded by the activity of the speculative reason. Just as the permanent sense of duty requires ethical theory, and remains unalterable in its nature, however various may be the explanations which are given of it, so the abiding religious aspiration of mankind asks for some interpretation which it may at least provisionally accept, and is justly dissatisfied with any theory of the origin and nature of things in which it does not hold an honourable place. It is possible, no doubt, for religion and thought to stand apart from one another. As one may be virtuous who knows nothing of ethical philosophy, so one may have a living faith and piety who cares little for the labours of the theologian; and, on the other hand, speculation may pursue its course as though no sense of sin or longing after holiness had ever penetrated the human soul. But this separation between two of our permanent faculties cannot be healthy for either. Quietly to ignore one whole department of our mental life is the reverse of philosophical; and we may be sure that men will not finally accept any system against which the finer and deeper elements of their being continually chafe. But as little can religion be content with inarticulate cries when once the powers of thought have been awakened. We are then impelled to interpret the voice of the Spirit, and rationally to justify our interpretation; and in this way a multitude of problems arise which we cannot be satisfied to leave unresolved or without correlation both with themselves and with the entire organism of knowledge. In other words, theology springs from the union of religion and thought, and only when these are raised to their highest

efficiency, and kept in health by their reciprocal action, can we feel sure of our ground. We refer now to theological theory in its widest scope, and not to those literary, historical, or exegetical questions which sprout up so plenteously on our path; and we see that, next to the spiritual experiences which furnish his data, philosophical aptitude and training are essential to the theologian who would rise above the mere critical and scholarly departments of his science, and attain those large and comprehensive views which alone can make it acceptable to men of varied and extensive culture.

The two factors in theology which we have here indicated are, however, seldom perfectly combined. The cold logic of the speculative reason does not easily consort with the instinctive enthusiasm of religious impression, and, though they do not wholly part company, one or the other generally preponderates. They indicate two contrasted methods of approach between God and man, methods of which we may take the Greek and the Hebrew as furnishing typical examples. The Greek sought for the Divine by the path of philosophy. There must, indeed, have been some secret inspiration to start him on his career; but the interest of which he was conscious was a speculative interest, and the movement of Hellenic thought may be described in the present connection as an attempt on the part of the human mind to rise to the apprehension of God. The Hebrew, on the contrary, felt, not that he was seeking after God, but that God was seeking after him. His faith, like all true faith, was the response to a divine appeal. Instead of thinking it hard to discover God, and impossible to reveal him to the multitude, he found his path beset by him on

every side, and owned him as an encompassing presence from whom he could not flee. The profound truths which lay close to his experience he did not think out and logically establish, but uttered in words of poetry and prophecy, and called on all who would to hear. He felt that of himself he could not speak, and that the pure radiance of the eternal light might be dimmed in passing through the veil of humanity; yet he could not choose but cry aloud what came to him as the word of God, and he knew that his countrymen must in their inmost hearts confess the truth of what he said. Neither of these methods could by itself produce a theology; and, accordingly, theology in its strict sense is absent alike from the classical writings of Greece and from the Hebrew Scriptures. The systems unfolded in the former we more properly describe as philosophy; and in the latter, while great central truths are enunciated in words which with unrivalled power reveal the soul to itself and waken its dormant energies, there is little attempt to reduce these truths to a system and to place them upon rational grounds. These two movements of the human mind had to be brought into combination before theology could arise; and hence it was when, in Christianity, Hebrew inspiration transfused itself through Grecian thought, that theology, as distinguished on the one hand from philosophy, and on the other from the primary utterances of faith, became an acknowledged power in the world.

Now, if theology is to resume a worthy position, and once more command the respect of educated laymen, it must still unite these two factors. It must grow from the spirit and be shaped by thought. It is of course possible without any original force to hand down a traditional theo-

logy, which represents an ancient inspiration and the knowledge of a bygone age. But, even granting that its doctrines are true, they cannot be understood unless the struggles of the soul out of which they sprang repeat themselves in us, and their relations to a constantly advancing culture will require continually some fresh adjustment. A series of dogmas from which the soul has departed can only betray us into false professions of a religion which has never touched us; and the least perfect truth which comes to us with the thrill of a new experience, has more regenerating power than the completest system which lies like a stone figure outside of our hearts. Admitting, then, for the moment that the form of theology has been permanently settled by supernatural authority, still its vitality can be maintained only by the fresh forces of inspiration; and if we respond no more to a living word which would take possession of us, and drive us with holy zeal against the world's falsity and sin, our creeds must die, and fail to arouse that vivid interest which is accorded only to original creations of the mind. But how few that mingle freely in the busy thought of our time, and attempt to estimate justly the recent discoveries of science, can accept the old theology without at least serious modifications! Dogma after dogma, which formerly satisfied the most instructed intellect, can satisfy no more. Once again, as in many a past crisis, God is teaching the world that a dead mechanical belief will not do instead of the living energies of soul and thought. Our sleepy traditionalism is being rudely shaken, and for my part I welcome the shock of battle, and think it better that men should even, for a time, cry out in agony, "O God, why hast thou forsaken us?" than tread

the round of a spiritless routine, in which the awful reality of God is never recognized, and no sublime ideal disturbs with divine rebuke the petty self-complacency of an undoubting formalism. In such a crisis, it is clear that the intellect must be wide awake, and seek for new interpretations of ancient problems; and to whatever extent it may borrow the forms of the past, it must fill them with the power of modern life. When heart and mind speak the language of to-day, and prove by their simple sincerity that they are not held back by the rusty fetters of professional custom, but drawn forward by golden links of faith and hope for the future, theology will once more obtain the respectful hearing which is given to every genuine expression of man's interior force.

Here, then, we rest our plea for freedom. To a theology thus conceived liberty is indispensable; and you might as reasonably look for the highest results in poetry, art, or science, if you rigidly prescribed beforehand the path which they must take, as in religion if you refuse it any independent vision, and compel it to tread in time-worn ruts. It is not because we deem theology dead, but because we know it to be alive, that we desire to leave it unbound. If communion with God is a reality, we must allow the soul to hear for itself the divine voice, and, lifted above the world in the solitary exaltation of prayer, to receive that measure of light which the bounteous Giver has designed for it. If the great march of science and thought is a reality, we must allow the mind to mingle in the crowd, and press on towards a fuller and deeper interpretation of the world in which it lives. When these two movements are permitted to go on without unnatural checks, they escape the antagon-

ism which has been artificially fostered between science and religion, and proceed with the harmony of mutual friendship. The higher thought responds to the higher feeling, and the truer theory is found to be a spiritual gain. But when through the terror of a secret unbelief which always trembles before a difference of opinion, or a presumption which supposes that its "views" are the final revelation of the Spirit, we chain up faith and reason, those two feet by which men climb to God, we degrade theology to a pale and shrivelled captive, whose eyes, habituated to the dungeon, cannot bear the light, and whose faltering tongue babbles an old-world language. Here, as in politics, unjust repression produces its own Nemesis in the shape of the very evils which we dread, and the mind, being refused the orderly progress of natural development, advances with the blind excesses of revolution.

It is a matter of unfeigned rejoicing that the principle of spiritual freedom which our College has consistently maintained since its foundation is obtaining such ample recognition at the present day. A new temper is coming over theological discussion, and religious questions are treated with a comprehensive knowledge, a manly understanding, and a power of spiritual appreciation, which promise the happiest results. This change is due to many circumstances, but not least to the progress of science, which has deprived the theologians of their old dogmatic confidence, and compelled them to reconsider their position. There are some to whom this process appears altogether painful. They lament the decay of faith; they become apprehensive of the freedom which they themselves have helped to foster; and though the iron bands

of Rome have snapped under the pressure of human thought, they would endeavour to restrain by a silken thread the restiveness of speculation. But those of a more hopeful temperament think they can already discern two important spiritual gains. In the first place, men are being thrown back upon the inner resources and primary essentials of religion; in other words, they are more genuinely religious. Nothing is more certain than that men may make church or dogma a substitute for religion, and without conscious insincerity profess their allegiance to Christianity while they know nothing of its spirit. But when the form is temporarily obscured, they are driven to seek behind the form for that inward and spiritual essence which alone can vivify. In spite of many discouraging appearances, may we not see that while the theology of the sixteenth century is losing its hold upon men, the pure spirit of Christ is sinking deeper into the heart of the world, and preparing the way for a juster, holier, and more humane society? And, secondly, as a consequence of this, there is an increasing unity of the spirit. The nearer we are drawn to God, the more do we realize our brotherhood; and over the crumbling walls of partition which the sects have reared, we are looking into one another's eyes, and finding that the sons of God are everywhere. More and more the differences which divide us are seen to be superficial, the imperfect pictures of fallible minds; and deep within the soul is that life of heavenly communion which flows from the creative energy of God. Our interpreting thoughts have many tongues—the language of the Spirit is one; and the time must be surely coming when, through the deeper wisdom of the chastened

mind, the work of that Spirit will be complete, and human brotherhood be something better than a name.

We welcome you, then, to the joyous responsibilities of freedom. It is not for you to lift any sectarian flag, or feed men with the husks of party names and cries instead of the grace and truth of God. It is not for you to denounce as crimes what you deem the errors of truth-loving men, or, with sad forebodings, to mistake the blindness of your own hearts for the descending night of irreligion, but to be heralds of the dawn, and prophets of a kingdom of God which is slowly shaping itself out of the seeming chaos of human thought and passion. Only keep close to the central light, and remember that none but a pure and simple heart can reflect the divine ray, and none but an intellect which puts aside every personal claim can exercise a just judgment. If we have been right in our rapid survey of the nature of theology, the ideal theologian must have a lofty and serene soul, which "dwells apart," conversant with eternal things, and aiming at what this world can never give. He must have a sympathy which, itself untouched by the sinfulness of human passion, yet can reach and understand its lowest depths. He must have a mind well stored, with power of insight to read the deep experiences of men, and quick to exercise the keen edge of thought. Few are called to stand upon this high level; but if our aim be ever upward, we shall not wholly fail or prove quite unworthy of that inheritance of spiritual liberty into which it has been our privilege to enter.

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